

VZCZCXRO6998
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHDO #0332/01 1151359
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 241359Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7874
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 0182
RUEHAE/AMEMBASSY ASMARA 0104
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0035
RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI 0037
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 0080

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000332

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/24/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [QA](#) [ET](#)

SUBJECT: QATAR'S REACTION TO ETHIOPIAN ANNOUNCED BREAK IN
DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael A. Ratney,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Indications are that critical Al Jazeera coverage of Ethiopia in recent weeks may have been the final straw in Ethiopia's decision, announced April 21, to break diplomatic ties with Qatar. The MFA official responsible for African Affairs told us the decision came as a complete surprise, and he acknowledged that Qatar's good relations with Eritrea played a big role in the worsening relations between Ethiopia and Qatar. He said Ethiopia's decision would change little on the ground, since neither country posted diplomatic personnel to the other's capital. The diplomatic community in Doha was equally surprised by the Ethiopian announcement. According to the Eritrean Ambassador, Qatar's involvement in Somalia was a big factor in Ethiopia's decision. He, other diplomats, and our MFA interlocutor acknowledged to varying degrees recent Al Jazeera reports as factors contributing to the Ethiopian Government's decision. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Following April 21 press reports announcing Ethiopia's breaking of diplomatic ties with Qatar, in which the Government of Ethiopia named Qatar as "a major source of instability in the Horn of Africa and more widely," an unnamed Qatari official, who briefed the press April 22, publicly denied the Ethiopian characterization of Qatar's role in Africa. Further, Qatar's MFA took the unusual step April 23 of sending to diplomatic missions in Doha a statement on the Ethiopian Government's accusations, citing "an official source at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

¶3. (SBU) Below is MFA's unofficial translation into English of the statement, a copy of which the Ministry provided to Embassy Doha.

"An official source at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has expressed surprise at the decision -- in the statement by the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry -- to sever diplomatic ties with the State of Qatar and the baseless and unfounded allegations leveled against it.

The official source affirmed that the policy of the State of Qatar is based on a clear and firm vision with a desire to promote security, stability and non-interference in the affairs of other States as well as combating terrorism in all its manifestations and forms. The official source underlined that the Ethiopian allegations are dangerous and that what the Ethiopian Government should have done was to seek precision as regard to such dangerous statements.

The official source further said that the misleading Ethiopian claims and the allegations leveled against the

State of Qatar in the Ethiopian statement represent a blatant attempt to justify the wrong policies of the Ethiopian Government.

The official source called on the Ethiopian Government to refrain from involving the State of Qatar in its rifts, recalling that the Ethiopian Government has previously made similar claims but the State of Qatar preferred not to reply out of the hope that the Ethiopian Government would stop such wrong behaviors." (End unofficial translation.)

14. (C) Eritrea's Ambassador to Qatar told a number of diplomats on the margins of an April 22 state lunch in honor of visiting Algerian President Bouteflika that Ethiopia had been very critical of Qatar's decision "some years ago" to grant asylum to a former leader of the Somalia Union of Islamic Courts, and relations between Qatar and Ethiopia had been tense over Somalia for some time. He said that Ethiopia's decision to break relations was primarily based on Qatar's perceived actions in Somalia and not on any border disputes between Eritrea and Ethiopia, adding that reports aired on Arabic and English broadcasts of Doha-based Al Jazeera television the week of April 15 also contributed to the Ethiopian announcement. These reports (which Embassy Doha has reviewed) portrayed the Ethiopian Government's role in the Ogaden conflict in an unfavorable light.

15. (C) In an April 24 meeting, Qatar's MFA Director for African and Asian Affairs, Abdul Rahman Al-Khulaifi, told P/E Chief and PolOff that Qatar was shocked by the Ethiopian announcement to break off relations and had not seen it coming. Without prompting, he noted that Al Jazeera had in recent weeks aired a live discussion program in which an

DOHA 00000332 002 OF 002

Eritrean official was a participant. He also cited as an example reporting on the Ogaden conflict. Without saying so explicitly, Al-Khulaifi left the clear impression that he suspected Al Jazeera's coverage caused the Ethiopian Government to announce the breaking of relations. He added that states more important than Ethiopia had expressed ire at Al Jazeera's reporting without effect, and that Ethiopia would not succeed in changing Al Jazeera's coverage by taking this action, which he predicted Ethiopia would eventually regret.

16. (C) Citing Ethiopian Government statements that Qatar played an unhelpful military role in the Horn of Africa, Al-Khulaifi laughed, commenting that it was absurd to suggest that Qatar's small military could destabilize anything. On the contrary, Al-Khulaifi stressed Qatar's commitment to stabilizing the situation in the Horn of Africa. He said it was unfortunate that Ethiopia distanced itself from Qatar because of Qatar's good relations with Eritrea. Qatar desires good relations with Ethiopia, he continued, and does not believe that bad relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea should mean that Qatar has to choose sides.

17. (C) Pointing to Qatar's mediation in the Horn of Africa, Al-Khulaifi recounted how Thailand in recent weeks had asked Qatar to approach Eritrea about releasing the crew of a Yemeni fishing boat, whose crew consisted of a number of Thai nationals. Qatar intervened and, according to Al-Khulaifi, Eritrea released the vessel's crew from jail. Asked what role, if any, Qatar's involvement in Somalia may have played in the Ethiopian announcement, Al-Khulaifi declined to speculate or comment. He concluded that the Ethiopian decision ultimately would not change much, since no Qatari diplomats are posted in Ethiopia, and Ethiopia's Ambassador to Kuwait, who ostensibly represents his government in Doha, had never sought to present his credentials to the Amir.

18. (C) Comment: The diplomats assembled at the April 22 lunch, like our MFA interlocutor, expressed genuine surprise at Ethiopia's sudden rupture of diplomatic relations with Qatar. It has been common knowledge that relations between

Ethiopia and Qatar were not good, in large part because Qatar has developed warm relations with Eritrea. Nonetheless, diplomats with whom we have spoken offered no compelling explanation for Ethiopia's sudden decision to break relations at this time. While only the Ethiopian Government (and possibly the GOQ) knows for sure, diplomats in Qatar cite Al Jazeera reports leading up to Ethiopia's announcement as the most likely final straw in Ethiopian eyes.

RATNEY